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ABSTRACT

This booklet presents three brief papers which focus on movement activities, transition activities, and incorporating parental assistance in preschool classrooms. "Let's Get Moving" suggests many circle, imagery, and mime exercises, for individuals, pairs, or groups of children. "Tips on Handling Transition Times" offers techniques teachers can use to help children adjust to different activities, and suggests some short activities to involve uneasy or impatient children. "Parents: A Plus in the Preschool" lists a variety of useful duties for parents to perform in the classroom. (BRT)

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MEMOS FOR TEACHERS AND CAREGIVERS OF YOUNG CHILDREN

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LET'S GET MOVING!

Maybe you don't feel at ease flapping your arms or bending with the wind. But still, you've decided to try some movement activities in your classroom.

You'll find, once you get started, that movement activities can be enjoyable for both you and the children, and can provide children with opportunities to:

. explore all the different ways their bodies can move,

. practice coordinating movement with rhythm,

. learn how movement is related to time, space, force, and flow, and

. discover that all kinds of ideas and concepts can be expressed -- and communicated to others -- through movement.

Some children will take naturally to movement activities; others are likely to feel self-conscious and embarrassed, especially at first. So it's a good idea to begin gradually with a few warm-ups and imagery exercises.

Circle Exercises

Have the children sit in a circle on the floor, and tell them that you're going to be exploring different ways a body can move. Ask each child to move his arm in a circle first slowly, then quickly. Add other dimensions: position in space (arm up high, down low); force (heavy, light); flow (jerky, smooth). First do each movement separately; later, try combining two or more movements (smooth and high, low and slow), etc. Then try the same activities with other body parts, like a foot or

elbow. Have the children practice movement activities in different directions, too: left, right, in front, in back, forward, backward, sideways.

Make sure the children know what you mean when you say slow and smooth, fast and jerky, twist and turn. (Agree on common terms right from the start to avoid confusion later when you ask children to combine a number of different movements.)

Some other circle activities you might ask the children to do:

•Expand and deflate like a balloon (from a sitting to a standing position).

•Get up and down within five beats of the drum as if you were thin as a toothpick, as if you were very fat, as if someone were pulling you up by the neck.

•Use your nose and point to the clock. Use your elbow and point to the light on the ceiling. Use your knee to point to the door.

Imagery and Mime Exercises

Ask each child to "make a picture in his mind's eye" of a tree in the wind and then tell the rest of the group what that picture is like. You'll get a variety of answers: Robbie might be thinking of the willow tree blowing gently, Jane might picture a palm tree in a hurricane, Nancy might describe a tall pine that only sways a little at the top. This kind of activity helps children see that each of them has a different way of thinking about the same thing. You can explain that when you're doing movement in the classroom, you want each child to make this same kind of "picture in his mind" before he begins to move. You want to encourage each child to create his own movements rather than copy someone else's.

Here are a few ideas to help the children practice making images. Say to the children:

.Imagine that you have a needle in your hand. See if you can pass it to your neighbor without dropping it. (Then try this with a cup, kitten, a tray with glasses full of water, etc. Let the children think of other objects to pass.)

.Pretend there's a box right in front of you. Now pull something out of the box. Does it have a handle? a long neck? Is it round? heavy? Think how big the box might be.

Activities in Space

As both you and the children begin to feel more comfortable about doing movement activities, you might try some exercises that can be done in a very small area. Here are a few samples:

.Pretend you are a snowman melting in the sun; a tree in a wind storm.

.Can you: jump, turn, jump? stretch, turn, twist? (You could try these in high or low space, maybe to a drum beat.)

.Can you be a box? a bowl? a snake? a bird eating a worm? a very large animal?

.How many ways can you push a doorbell button without using your hands?

When you think the chidren are confident and ready to move freely over a wider area, begin exercises across space. A few ideas:

. Pretend you have a heavy weight on your right shoulder. Move across the room slowly.

. You wake up in a room full of feathers. How are you going to get across the room to the door? Now pretend it's a room with a foot of water in it.

. Someone has spilled honey all over the floor. You have to walk across it to get to the telephone.

. Your left ankle is sore and stiff from a fall. Walk across the room, first very slowly, then in a hurry.

. Listen to the rhythm. Think of a way to move across the floor.

. You're walking in a forest and have to cross a stream. You have a choice of trying to find a pathway on stones in the water (some small, slippery, far apart, etc.) or balancing your way over a narrow tree that's fallen across the water.

. You're rearranging furniture in the room. Pretend that you're pushing a heavy armchair across the room; a small table; a rug.

As children begin to enjoy these activities, you might suggest that a few children work together in pairs or small groups. Let them talk about different ways of doing the movements; they may want to put their ideas together.

Working in Pairs and Small Groups

Children working in pairs or in groups of 3, 4, or 5, might enjoy activities such as these:

.Form letters or numbers together ("3" or "4" would be easy at first).

.Express the concept "round" in a number of different ways. Now try being a box, or a chair.

.Let one child be a lump of clay. One or two other children can "shape" the clay into a round form, a tall, thin one, etc. by pushing or rolling gently, moving arms and legs into different positions. Then let children reverse roles.

.Have children face each other and play follow-the-leader with

different kinds of hand, arm or body movements. Reverse roles.

.Ask each child to be a machine part and then to make the sound of that part. Start the machine parts one at a time with their sounds. Move across the room as one machine.

.Create through movement a story using three different forms of water (steam, ice and liquid). Add sounds and motion to the exercise.

.Have three children be different parts of one animal. Can they show how the animal would walk? eat? drink?

Adding to Movement

A good way to make movement activities more interesting is to add props such as carpet pieces, scarves, plastic or yarn pompons, crepe streamers, balloons, bean bags, pillows, feathers, hats, masks, etc. (Make sure these props add to the movement activities and don't become a distracting element.) You might also want to use musical instruments. Records motivate children to explore and express themselves. Put on a record with soft flowing music to encourage the child to move freely around the room. Add a scarf or balloon. See if the movement changes. Now change the record, put on lively music and see what happens. Have the children move individually at first, then in pairs. (Notice how the activity changes again.)

A Few Things to Remember

When you begin to use movement activities in your classroom or center here are a few general suggestions to keep in mind:

. Make sure you've pushed furniture and other smaller objects out of the way so that children can move across the room freely. Check to see that the floor is free of tacks, pins, and other sharp objects.

especially if children have their shoes off.

. Use one instrument (drum or tambourine is good) for establishing rhythmic patterns, adding an accent to a beat, or to signal the group to stop and start.

. Check into outdoor space. Being able to move freely on a playground or grassy area adds a whole new dimension to movement.

. Be aware that children's enthusiasm for movement activities decreases when they have to wait a long time for a turn. (Divide your children into several groups instead of two long lines, for instance.)

. From time to time, encourage individual children or small groups to let the rest of the children see what they've been doing. If children see different interpretations of the same exercise they may grow more confident about expressing their own ideas and feelings.

TIPS ON HANDLING TRANSITION TIMES

. Your aide hasn't arrived yet, but all is going well. As you're helping the last few children get their boots off, Marcia (who's been contentedly working a puzzle) realizes her mother has left and lets out a piercing howl.

. You're passing out instruments for music time and find you're five short. As you try to figure out what to do, the decibel level in the room reaches record heights.

. The bus has arrived for the field trip to the zoo. Ted and Donny are first in line at the door of your room. Donny pushes Ted who jostles Elaine who is hurriedly returning the big jar of red paint to the counter. Catastrophe!

Even in well-planned centers or preschool, there are times like these when things just seem to fall apart. You may find that many of your difficult times occur in periods of transition: transition between home and school, between different activities, between something that's become part of your regular routine and a special event, or at times when children move from one place or teacher to another. In almost all these transitions, there's a change in pace and mood which somehow creates a sense of uneasiness that can interrupt the flow of the day.

Planning ahead is probably the key to making these transition times smoother for yourself and the children. It helps to think through in advance what you're going to do, to get together all the materials you'll

need, to think about some of the things that might go wrong, and to plan a variety of activities that children can do on their own.

The transition between home and school is difficult for those children who feel a bit uneasy about leaving home territory.

Having a certain amount of routine at arrival time makes it easier for some children to get into the swing of the day. Let children know that they can go hang up their coats, take their show-and-tell treasures to a certain place, or help set out breakfast things. If some early arrivals like to stay with you near the door as you welcome the other children, they might help Billy get his boots off, find Lucy's missing mitten, or get Marcia's favorite toy if she looks tearful.

You'll want to make the most of the brief time you have to talk with parents. It helps to find out that David's father is in the hospital and that Joan's grandmother is visiting. (You'll understand then why David suddenly gets upset so easily and why Joan keeps asking "Is it time to go home yet?")

If you don't have enough regular help and get along well with one or more mothers who don't have to go back home or to work right away, suggest that they stay awhile some days and help the children get started.

Children have different levels of involvement in what they're doing: some can stop one activity and go on to the next right away; others wind up and down slowly. It may take Jimmy a long time to decide what he's going to paint, but once he gets started he becomes totally absorbed.

Why not sometimes let him have his midmorning snack right where he's working instead of insisting that he stop painting and come to the table?

If Joan can't seem to settle down after playing outdoors, don't insist that she go directly to the rug where a group is waiting for story time. (She'll only start teasing Gina and disrupt the story.) You might suggest that she look for the Red Riding Hood puppet and play with it as you read the story.

When Johnny is bursting with energy and obviously not ready for the quiet activity you've planned, suggest that he move the tricycles and wagons out to the play yard, put paper on the easels, or water the plants.

While some children need a little time to themselves between activities, most children don't like to wait very long with nothing to do. Sometimes they'll get into mischief just to relieve the boredom of standing in line to wash hands or waiting until everyone else puts things away so another activity can begin.

It's a good idea to plan a variety of things children can do by themselves or with a few other children whenever there's a wait between activities. Pegboards, puzzles, listening to records, etc., are good for transition times. You can also ask children who aren't busy if they'd like to help you. (For instance, Jack and Ellen might set out and count the musical instruments if they've finished their lotto game. Or Susie and Jeff could straighten the housekeeping corner.)

Ongoing projects that children can dip in and out of are good for any transition time. Let Sally know that any time she's finished early

she can go over and work on her seed mosaic or start another box building for the class village. If Tod and Allan have a weather project going, you might suggest that between worktime and juice they could take their thermometer outside and check the temperature.

Almost as important as planning ahead is learning to unplan -- to be flexible enough to abandon a project that's not working out and start another activity. Learn to capitalize on unexpected events.

The sudden snow squall that's taking the children's attention away from the math games will undoubtedly be the highlight of the day, and can be an invaluable learning experience as well. Put away the games and let the children go to the windows. Ask the children what they like to do best in the snow, ask if anyone has been in a really big snow, and if possible, go outside right away before the snow stops. (Later, when you come back inside you can read a story, find some songs about snow, make snow pictures, etc.)

If the repairmen start pounding on the roof of your center in the middle of story time, take advantage of the interruption. Go outside with the children so they can watch the workmen and ask them some questions. (Do you ever fall off? How long does it take to make a roof?) Some children might want to inspect the roof scraps and later find out more about different kinds of roofs.

If there's a sudden emergency (Sharon throws up in the housekeeping corner, Eddie comes in with a bleeding knee, the toilet overflows) stop what you're doing and have your aide direct the children away from the problem area and suggest activities while you attend to the immediate

problem. You might ask Robbie to get out the first aid kit while you wash off Eddie's knee, or have Lucinda and Nancy go find the janitor or the mop-up supplies.

Later on, after an emergency has been handled and you have the children assembled again, you might review safety rules or encourage discussion about what happened (to explain how to prevent the same kind of accident from happening again, or to reassure the children that Sharon and Eddie will be fine in a little while.)

Don't try to keep a strict schedule on special days, the day you're going to the aquarium, for instance. Instead, try to center your activities around what is going to happen. Put out a collection of books about fish and aquariums, talk about how the fish get in the aquarium, try to show a film or filmstrip if possible. Talk about how you'll get to the aquarium, what the building is like, some of the things you'll see.

Try not to have children line up at the door to wait for the bus driver. Start putting things away in plenty of time, and then fill in the time with group singing or finger plays, or let children get out a few games that can be put away quickly.

Be prepared with a few games to use in case you have to wait a little while on a street corner or in a building for the bus back to the center. Guessing games (I'm looking at something red -- can you guess what it is?) and continued stories (each child adds on to a story you start) sometimes work well. When you get back to the center, don't expect the children to settle down immediately

into routine activities. Suggest that anyone who wants to can look through the books and pictures again (they'll probably mean more now), or draw and color different kinds of fish that later can be pasted on a mural. Or you might have the children make a tape recording (each child could tell what he liked best about the trip) and promise to play it back the next day.

Have a "bag of tricks" with suggestions and supplies for unusual, high-interest activities ready to leave with a substitute or aide for times when you have to be away unexpectedly. (You might want to use it yourself on the day both your aides call in sick!) Then if a planned activity just doesn't work out, there will be recipes to fall back on. (You can even include some gimmicky ideas you'd usually avoid.)

If you know in advance that you'll be away for a vacation or conference, tell the children before you leave, and talk about some of the things they will be doing while you're away. If possible, have your substitute come in briefly a day or so before you leave so she'll at least be a little familiar to the children.

You might keep a few notes about specific interests and needs of different children to give your substitute: Marcy usually gets sleepy before naptime, so suggest that she curl up on the rocking chair in the corner; Mike is interested in snakes right now -- he likes to tell people that his pet snake is loose, but he really doesn't have one.

As you learn to make the most of transition times, you may find that the day goes by much more smoothly for you. And there's an important by-product: by gradually encouraging children to take more responsibility for choosing their own activities during in-between times, you'll be helping them to become more self-directed and independent.

PARENTS: A PLUS IN THE PRESCHOOL

When a teacher needs an "extra pair of hands" in the classroom, the most likely candidate is often one of the children's parents.

With parent assistance, the teacher could take a little extra time to help Billy begin a new project, or get together a packet of activities to send home to Mindy, who's sick.

Parents, experienced in doing things with their own children, can become invaluable to a program if a teacher makes them welcome.

Many programs already have effective methods for encouraging parents to come to their preschool centers: through PAC (Parent Advisory Committee) meetings, parent conferences and workshops, potluck suppers, special programs children take part in , and arts and crafts activities for parents. Once parents are at the center, teachers can explain why it's so important for them to become involved in their children's education.

It usually makes parents feel more welcome (and needed) if teachers suggest immediately some specific ways they can help--both in and out of the classroom.

Some parents may not feel comfortable--particularly at first--about working directly with the children, but might be happy to help the teacher by making puppets at home or collecting materials for collage or woodworking activities. Or they might like to do jobs like these in the classroom:

. Record attendance.

. Assemble samples of children's work for booklets or displays.

. Arrange details for neighborhood field trips.

. Help file pictures or collections of poems, songs, fingerplays, and other activities.

. Gather information for some of the reports teachers must do, such as the number of children eating meals at school, types and numbers of health services, etc.

. Prepare materials for class activities such as art, games, water play, etc.

. Locate resources and materials for the teachers and for use with children.

Other parents may be interested in working with the children immediately and could be asked to:

. Assist a small group of children (under the teacher's guidance) with a language game or a short math or science activity.

. Read (or tell) a story or poem.

. Help the teacher with art and music activities.

. Be available to talk with and listen to the children as they work. An adult can often extend a child's understanding of what he's doing--or stimulate his curiosity--by asking a simple question like: "I wonder what would happen if...?" or "Did you notice that...?" During water play, for example, a parent might comment that water takes the shape of its container, or ask Sally, "Do you think that aluminum pie pan would still float with another block in it?"

. Take charge of activities such as cooking, caring for pets, fingerpainting, etc.

. Assist during transition periods by supervising the clean-up of one activity and/or preparation for the next.

. Help a child with activities such as counting how many red cars or trucks pass by the window, lining up biggest to smallest leaves, etc.

. Take one or two children on short trips in the neighborhood: to see the new kittens at the house next door; to look for signs of spring; to watch the bulldozer down the street.

. Help with arrival and dismissal times (putting on and taking off clothing, and getting children ready to go home).

. Be available in emergencies (taking a child to the toilet in a hurry, soothing a child who skins a knee, taking charge if the teacher should have to leave the room).

. Observe children as they work and let the teacher know if any child seems to need special attention.

It's important for teachers to remember that parents want a good program for their children and are often willing to assist if they know what to do and feel they can make a real contribution.

When parents working in the classroom are over-supervised, however, they sometimes feel that their efforts aren't appreciated. There are times when activities must be carefully coordinated and structured by the teacher. But whenever possible, it's best if a teacher can first give parents some directions and then let them try the activity by themselves.

Parent involvement can help both adults and children in a program.

Teachers can learn from parents--as well as well as the other way around. By observing the ways parents work with children and how the children respond, teachers often gain new insight about how children learn. (Teachers watching parents interacting with children often see things they miss when they themselves are busy with the children.)

Parents have a better idea of what's happening in their children's program, and incidentally acquire useful information about child development by watching other adults handle children in various situations.

And the children not only have the satisfaction of seeing their own parents in the classroom in a new role, but also begin to learn that home and school aren't so far apart after all.

Postscript

The Educational Resources Information Center/Early Childhood Education Clearinghouse (ERIC/ECE) is one of a system of 16 clearinghouses sponsored by the National Institute of Education to provide information about current research and developments in the field of education. The clearinghouses, each focusing on a specific area of education (such as early childhood, teacher education, language and linguistics), are located at universities and institutions throughout the United States.

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The Early Childhood Education Clearinghouse (ERIC/ECE) distributes a quarterly newsletter ($2.00 - 4 issues) which reports on new programs and publications, and RIE documents of special interest. For a complete list of ERIC/ECE publications, or if you would like to subscribe to the Newsletter write: Publications Office/IREC, College of Education, University of Illinois, 805 West Pennsylvania Avenue, Urbana, Illinois 61801. All orders must be accompanied by check or money order, payable to the University of Illinois. Sorry, we cannot bill.

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